

Animals at the Fair

From Menagerie To Pony Roundabouts

Shows with animals were a popular attraction at fairs for a long time. The men and women who presented dangerous animals were considered strong and daring.

Until the end of the 18th century, travelling animal shows usually featured only individual or a few animals such as dogs, monkeys and dancing bears. A supposedly familiar and peaceful interaction with them was the focus of the demonstrations. With the beginning of the 19th century, the number of animals on display became increasingly larger. Also, the attitude towards the animals and the training changed. From then on, animal trainers were regarded as the tamers of supposedly bloodthirsty beasts.

The presentation of exotic animals such as reptiles, bears, lions, elephants or even seals took place mainly in travelling menageries or animal shows. In "monkey and dog theatres", on the other hand, the animals performed acrobatic tricks and staged "human actions". Flea circuses were also often found at fairs.

In "pony roundabouts", horses were used as live riding and pulling animals. The ponies often ran in circles for hours. Due to the increasing use of animal welfare organisations, this type of offer has been increasingly restricted and partly banned.